

LutheranWoman

January/February 2002

TODAY

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Our Forgotten Sisters in Palestine
Thawing the Frozen Heart

Forgiving
Extremists for Love





EDITORS' NOTE & LETTERS

Dear Readers,

Happy New Year! We hope that 2002 brings each and every one of you much peace and many blessings. The themes for this expanded issue are Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Renewal. We think you'll enjoy these various explorations as you read about, think about, and pray about our relationships with one another and between oneself and God. Peace and blessings —The Editors

Letters

I want to thank you for the article "A Heavy Metal Christian?" by Debbie Lecki (October 2001). I, too, am a Christian who loves this type of music because it is "fun and energetic," and I like it loud!

My precious dad passed away in May suddenly from a massive heart attack, and that was an enormous shock to my world! While I remain strong in my faith, I found myself constantly asking God why my dad died when so many others survive.

Being a pastor's wife, usually I'm the one trying to comfort and be there for others. My dad was a strong Christian husband and father. I find comfort in those "heavy metal" words contained in some of my favorite songs. So, I would agree with Debbie—just because hard rock isn't your cup of tea, doesn't mean that it doesn't have a place in our world! God made us all different and speaks to us in different ways, but God loves us all the same!

Jana Weaver (a.k.a. "the rock 'n' roll preacher's wife!")
Logan, Ohio

I am submitting a picture that I thought was exceptionally lovely. It is a photo of my mother-in-law's circle from Trinity Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, New York. Her circle has been meeting for about 35 years and the group has formed lasting friendships.

In the midst of tragic news from New York City and around the world—it may be refreshing to see these happy faces from women who've survived earlier tragedies, such as World War II.

All the best to you and your wonderful publication.
Terri Speirs—Lutheran World Relief
St. Paul, Minnesota



Photo by Lorraine Speirs

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GIVE US THIS DAY

All Things Made New

by Marj Leegard

"HAPPY NEW YEAR!" IS A WONDERFUL GREETING, NOT ONLY FOR THE HAPPY WISH BUT FOR THAT GREAT WORD, *NEW*. *NEW* BRINGS MEMORIES OF SMELL AND TOUCH: THE DISTINCTIVE PERFUME OF NEW CLOTH, THE STARCHY FEEL OF PUFFED SLEEVES WITH THE STIFF BIAS BAND TO HOLD THEM IN ALL THEIR BOUFFANT GLORY.

Perhaps *new* is a different word for those who have grown up in a mega-mall economy. I cannot remember there ever being a garage or rummage sale when I was a child. We had nothing to sell—our clothing progressed from new to school to everyday, from older child to younger, to quilt blocks and the rag bag and the button box. Kitchen gadgets spent their old age still beating, stirring, and frying. Dishes were passed along from grandmother down the generations. Odds and ends of furniture made up the new-lweds' decor. We shopped at Mr. Sedberg's second-hand store for needed items not donated by relatives.

We peeked into the drawer where our Easter finery waited. The paper around the patent leather shoes rustled and coaxed, "Just try me on and walk across the floor. Mama will never know."

New and waiting. The year waits for our scribbling and scratching to make it our own. The year waits with a clean start. We will not be the cartoon baby in diapers and top hat, for we are still ourselves, and that is not bad. God has given us gifts to

use and burnish and use again. We are gifts to the new year.

But when we look over the precipice into the new year, we are glued to the spot. We don't want to go there. We want to go back 30 years and begin at *that* spot again. *This* new is not our new; it is trackless. We want to walk familiar paths. Then God calls us again. "Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten and everything is new. God has done it all" (2 Corinthians 5:17 CEV).

God treasures our innermost parts. The paths God has sketched out for us are paths for the new person God has made.

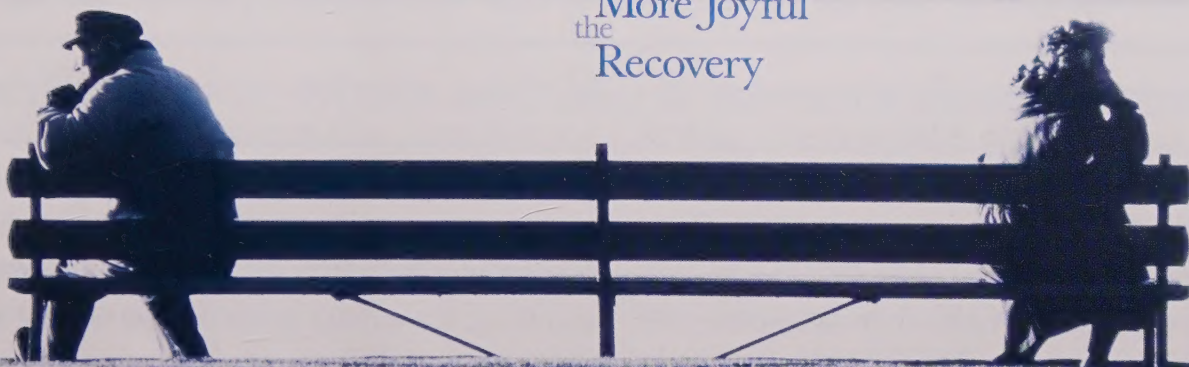
It is no use to sit down and make detailed lists of self-improvements we are going to begin immediately on Tuesday (or at least Wednesday). The longer the list, the more convinced we become that we are not fit for the journey and never will be. And then we remember—God has done it all. We are as new as the new year, and that is not strange, for we were new every day of the old year, *new* because Christ makes us so. God has done it all.

LWT columnist Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.

Thawing^{the} Frozen Heart

by Clare La Plante

^{the} Deeper
^{the} Hurt,
^{the} More Joyful
^{the} Recovery



Years ago, I had a deadly monotonous job at a publishing house in Chicago. For excitement I used to go on my lunch hour to hear lectures at a hall nearby. Sometimes they were interesting in unexpected ways. One cold winter day, I remember sitting through a particularly dull lecture by a particularly stiff academic. I don't remember the topic, but the speaker droned on and on. When it finally came time for questions from the audience, a ragged man in the back row, a street person who had found a place to stay warm for a while, raised his hand. He had slept through most of the talk, but now he had a question. His question was, "What is the meaning of life?"

The presenter squirmed—he knew everything about his esoteric specialty, but this was out of his field. Finally, he blurted out, "It's like that Bruce Springsteen song—'Everybody's got a hungry heart.'"

I remember that little event years later because it was so funny—the pretentious academic caught off guard. But I think I also remember it because the professor's answer is the stark truth. We all have hungry hearts, hearts that grasp and gape, like the mouths of baby birds, looking for love. But not all baby birds make it from the nest. Last spring, I found a baby bird dead on the sidewalk beneath the nest his parents had built outside my fourth-floor apartment

window. When our hearts are wounded, we're at risk as well: We freeze up, shut off from life's possibilities. We miss friendships, connections, and love.

Emotional renewal

The psalms, in their poetic beauty, are filled with entreaties for the heart. Psalm 42:11 says, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you

Think about the all the ways we have seen revenge play out, both in great stories and in the real world: Ahab became a bitter, obsessed man over his whale. Bodies mount up in Northern Ireland as the two sides go tit for tat. The Israelis and Palestinians are locked in a growing spiral of violence prompted by violence.

Every time we wish someone ill and they receive it, we suffer more. The heart gets a little sick. Days are

Every time we wish someone ill and they receive it, we suffer more

disquieted within me?" Psalm 42:2 reads, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?"

The writer George Leonard, in a compelling piece about his own experience with heart disease, likens his physical recovery to an emotional renewal. He imagines the walls that encased his heart tumbling down, releasing it from isolation. "I had somehow convinced myself that I had no right to express feelings of vulnerability or pain. I'd set impossibly high standards. I had become unforgiving of myself." Through heart-to-heart talks, so to speak, with others, long walks, yoga, and a deep desire for connection to the things that he had missed, he was able to recover, without surgery.

Finding the way

Certainly, it's not easy to unfreeze a heart. We can't just put it on the counter to thaw like tonight's dinner. Sometimes life opens up our heart for us—nature, childbirth, separation, and death can force our hearts to open in spite of ourselves. But more often, we live with the pain.

And we compound it with fantasies of revenge. Most of mine involve those who have hurt or rejected me; that's a pretty big body count. But when our hearts are filled with remorse or hate, we have no time for ourselves, for our love, for our Christ.

filled with rage. Families turn sour from resentment and unspoken words. Communities become wastelands of hate. Revenge is sweet—like candy, quick and gratifying. It's quickly gone, though, leaving sticky traces in our system. It's why revenge-seeking terrorists can never really win.

We start to turn little acts of terrorism on ourselves: eating or drinking too much, working ourselves into exhaustion, filling ourselves up on television and the media's insipid images and rancid gossip. Or we simply tune out the world, racing about, too busy.

This is antithetical to the teachings of Christ, who implored us to come into the world as we are—with unhardened hearts. But how do you maintain that state in a world that, to our hearts, must feel like a war zone?

Feeling the love

First, it's living with a radical thought—that open-heartedness is the way to live. Life is not about protecting ourselves from hurt. It's not about always being the smartest, the most worldly, the most cynical. It's about being a fool—as the dictionary defines a fool—for life: "One with a marked propensity or fondness for something."

You might also try breathing. Not shallow, half-hearted attempts, but bold breaths that open the passageways around the heart. Centering prayer—

where you choose a sacred word or symbol to meditate on—is a good idea, as is any combination of prayer and meditation. Nature is a warm balm for the frozen heart—trees, plants, rocks, and sea. The smells and colors of the world relax and calm. Try bringing bouquets of color into your house or office, too.

Talk with someone who loves you—friend, spouse, family member. It stimulates thawing, especially when you are listened to without judgment or reserve. Creative expression, like writing, painting, or singing, wakes up the frozen arteries. Join a choir or a writing circle. Take a watercolor class. Place yourself in the path of feelings—through movies, books, or journaling. Make sure you get a chance to cry and laugh. Get the juices flowing.

Flexing your forgiveness muscle

Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh offers an exercise in forgiveness in his book *Teachings on Love*. Picture someone in your mind and say the following words about that person: “May he/she be peaceful, happy, and light in body and in spirit. May he/she be free from injury. May he/she live in safety. May he/she be free from anger, disturbance, fear, worry, and anxiety.”

First, picture someone you like while doing this meditation. Then move on to someone neutral—like

with my own wounded heart, the thawing period has been like an extended trip to the dentist. We close our hearts off for good reason. When we decide to open them again, we let in the feelings that caused us to close up in the first place.

Embrace imperfection

The thawing heart, like the thawing spring, can be messy—muddy, dirty, and imperfect. Philippians 4:11 suggests that it’s wise to be content in whatever state we’re in. There’s probably no better advice: Accept yourself in all your imperfection.

This imperfection means that your heart may creak with effort. It may gasp for air. And often, it will close down temporarily, like a flower in the rain. But once it begins its opening, it’s likely to continue. And here’s an encouraging thought: It seems that the deeper we’ve felt grief and hurt, the more peace and joy seeps into these crevices. You’ll cry more, and more easily. You’ll laugh harder, and tell people you love them more. You’ll lose that awful self-consciousness that comes along with the deep freeze, that chilling thought, “What will people think?”

Thawing our hearts frees us up to be sacred in this world—in other words, to be ourselves. The Talmud says, “Honor the Lord with thy substance, with that which has been bestowed upon you. If you

Nature is a warm balm for the frozen heart—trees, plants, rocks, and sea

your mail carrier or electrician. Finally—and he recommends several months of practice before doing this—meditate on a loved one. He saves the hardest, and best, for last: your enemy—someone, he says, that just thinking about makes you angry.

You must pace yourself. Like anything that’s been frozen, if your heart is warmed too quickly, it may become re-traumatized. Thawing hurts. I know that

are beautiful, honor him who has made you so, fear him and praise him with the beauty he has bestowed upon you.”

A thawing heart brings your beauty back into the world. And that’s the best revenge, if we must insist on using that word: living truthfully, loving fully.

Clare La Plante is a writer and reporter from Chicago.



Nancy and Richard.

f o r g i v i n g

This is about my sister, God, and forgiveness.

by Jeanne Bishop

My sister: Nancy Bishop Langert, the youngest of three girls. Married to Richard Langert. Wickedly funny, sweetly pretty. She loved, in no particular order, singing, baseball, decorating, convertibles, kids, Scotland, tasteless jokes, picking the perfect Christmas present, and dogs. Pregnant at 25 with a longed-for first child. Dead a few months later, found murdered along with her husband in their home.

Rich had been handcuffed and shot execution-style in the back of his head. Nancy had been shot in the abdomen and side and left to bleed to death. Before she died, she had dragged herself over to her husband's body and written in her own blood a heart symbol and the letter "u." Love you.

I remember clearly the phone call from my father on the day he found their bodies. He said, "Nancy and Richard have been killed."

I asked Dad if he was kidding, demanding to know what he meant. He said, "Someone killed them."

At first I was numb.

Then I cried all the time.

But then I was really angry at God.

It was so unfair. Nancy was so good, so innocent, so in love with life. Richard was a gentle giant, the salt of the earth. Why them?

Nancy was a Christian. Surely from the moment she walked in the door and saw the killer waiting there, she must have been praying to God for help.

Why had God ignored her pleas?

I knew in my head that God gives people the freedom to choose to do evil. But my heart rebelled, asking angrily, "What about that psalm that says, 'A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not come near you?'" (Psalm 91:7)

But the whole time I was shaking my fist at God, I knew three things with certainty: one, that God existed; two, that Nancy, Richard, and their baby rested safely in God's arms; and three, that I would see them in heaven. And I've learned since then that God was not absent during my sister's agony; God was there, weeping and giving her the peace and strength to write her final message of love.

So first, in a sense, I forgave God. Then I forgave the killer.

The killer was caught six months after the murders. He was a local teenager with a long history of crimes and violence against others. What had his motive been this time? To this day, we don't know why he did it. He had bragged to a friend about killing my family members, and the friend, after some months, turned him in.

A jury convicted him of the double homicide of Nancy and Richard and of intentionally killing their unborn child. Because the killer was a juvenile at the time of the crimes, he was ineligible for the death penalty. He received a sentence of life without parole.

After the sentencing, the press asked my family if we were sorry that the killer didn't get the death penalty. My older sister Jennifer and I said no. We said that we were relieved that no more blood would be shed. We have since publicly forgiven the murderer.

Why? Why forgive him?

First, I forgive to honor Christ. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you . . . [L]ove your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you"

(Matthew 5:38–39). Jesus also said, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14–15). Jesus taught that we are to forgive, not to strike back in retaliation.

When my sister's killer was sentenced, he had a mother, a father, a sister, and a brother. I could not imagine telling them, "Your son, your brother, took my sister. I'll never hear her voice or see her face again. And now you're going to know exactly how that feels. More than that, you're going to know ahead of time the exact method and moment of that death, your son's death, your brother's death."

How could I inflict on his family the horrible grief inflicted on mine? It wouldn't bring Nancy back. It wouldn't give me the niece or nephew I should have had. Adding more loss to the world's burden, more broken-heartedness, would accomplish nothing.

Second, I forgive to honor God. I forgive because God has forgiven me. When Peter asked the question, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (Matthew 18:21, New American Standard Bible), Jesus answered him with this story: A slave owed his master, the king, a huge amount of money. The slave begged the king to forgive the debt; the king showed compassion and forgave. But immediately, the slave seized another man, a fellow slave who owed him money, and demanded payment. The slave showed no mercy, but threw his debtor into prison. The king then summoned the slave and demanded, "Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?" (Matthew 18:33 NASB) Jesus concludes the story with a strong command: "Forgive [your] brother from your heart" (Matthew 18:35 NASB).

I want to be clear: my forgiveness has nothing to do with the killer. He mercilessly shot a pregnant

woman in the belly and left her to die beside the lifeless body of her husband. He has never taken responsibility or shown remorse. He is a dangerous man who should be locked away forever. If forgiveness had to do with his deserving it, no forgiveness would be possible. He does not deserve it. But thank God, for our own sakes, forgiveness has nothing to do with deserving. It has to do with the grace of God.

Third, I forgive to honor Nancy. She loved and valued life. Her memorial could never be the death of another human being.

Nancy's death at age 25 taught me in the hardest, coldest, most shocking way possible how precious life is, how irreplaceable. Her death taught me that I have an obligation to live all these days that she will never have in a manner worthy of her and of God. That doesn't mean thirsting for revenge; it means working against violence—for instance, against the senseless proliferation of handguns—so that other families can be spared the suffering mine has endured.

Fourth, I forgive because I believe executing criminal offenders violates Christ's teaching and example.

Lately I find myself reading the gospels like the journalist I once was. I examine the facts, what people said and did, and try to draw conclusions from those bits and pieces. Here's what Jesus said and did about executions. He stopped one. "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). And he forgave the wrongdoer. "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now do not sin again" (John 8:11).

Jesus himself was the victim of an execution who asked forgiveness for his executioners. "Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing'" (Luke 23:34).

What can we conclude from this but that forgiveness is at the heart of who Christ is and of who he calls us to be?



Execution is incompatible with forgiveness. To paraphrase Sister Helen Prejean, the nun who reaches out to both the victims and perpetrators of murder, execution is the opposite of baptism. Baptism declares a person to be a child of God. Execution declares him to be human garbage.

Finally, I forgive for myself. The boxer Ruben "Hurricane" Carter, falsely convicted of murder and then released, once said, "Bitterness is an acid which consumes the vessel that contains it." Harboring rage toward Nancy's killer would only give him power over me; plotting violence against him would drag me down to his level.

I leave him to God.

Jeanne Bishop's sister and brother-in-law and their unborn child were murdered in 1990. Since then, Jeanne has been a passionate spokesperson for forgiveness and opposition to the death penalty. She is a member of the board of directors of Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation and a member of Amnesty International's Speaker's Bureau.

Listening to John

Forty Devotions for the Forty Days of Lent

by Ruth Harris and Elizabeth Hunter

In writing his gospel, John chose twenty days from Jesus' ministry to reveal who Jesus is. From each of those twenty days, we each selected a verse that spoke to us, from our point of view as mother (Ruth) and daughter (Elizabeth). For a richer Lenten experience, consider reading and listening to the sections surrounding each passage. What do you hear?

Ruth: Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29) John announces Jesus so boldly. I have tried to do the same by bringing my children to the faith community, even when they might have chosen to burrow under the blankets or watch cartoons.

Holy Lamb, thank you for those who announced you to me.

Elizabeth: He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. (John 1:33) How do we know God? Look for the Holy Spirit.

Descending dove, remain with us.

E: What are you looking for? (John 1:38) I find myself searching for a lot of things—a search that is rooted in my need for identity, purpose, and meaning.

Remind us, Lord Jesus, of what we pursue: You.

R: He said to them, “Come and see.” (John 1:39) As a kindergarten teacher, I invite eager children to come and see, to investigate life. So does Jesus!

Father, thank you for your invitation.

R: Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” (John 1:48) Jesus the rabbi knew just the right approach to spark a student's interest.

Lord, help us let go of our doubts.

E: “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” (John 1:50) The little things that cause us to believe are only a small part of the whole picture.

God, help us see more of your greatness.

R: My hour has not yet come. (John 2:4b) I rush in agitation or procrastinate and worry, but Jesus knows the right time for God's work.

God, reset our inner clocks to your time.

E: His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:5) Wise Mary shows us that obedience to our Lord accomplishes miracles.

Help us to hear and do what you tell us, God.

E: Stop making my father's house a marketplace! (John 2:16b) What if we found a full-fledged flea market in our home?

Let us honor you with worship, not ourselves with personal profit.

R: Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. (John 2:19b) God, more powerful than anything we can comprehend, raised Jesus from death and us to new life.

Omnipotent One, we bow before you!

R: No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. (John 3:5b) Seeing water pour over a bowed head, I feel my own baptism renewed.

Fill us with your Spirit today, Lord.

E: The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. (John 3:8a) As comforting as a windy autumn night or a soft spring breeze, the mystery of God is outside my grasp.

Blow where you choose, Breath of Life.

R: He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:30) John the Baptist knew his place in God's plan. Do we know our place?

Lord, turn us from our selfish ways. Increase in us your Spirit!

E: He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. (John 3:34) My grandma Cora knew that the best cooking is done without measuring.

Make us simmer with the Holy Spirit.

R: The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. (John 4:14b) Ordinary water is refreshing, pure, essential for life.

Water of the Spirit, well up from within to make the impossible, possible.

E: It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves. (John 4:42b) Faith, planted and nourished by my family, has taken root in my spirit.

Thank you for letting us "hear for ourselves."

R: The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." (John 4:49) The father pleads for his son, as I did when my son was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes.

Lord, we desperately need your healing word.

E: The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." (John 4:53a) As a little girl, I found this story as thrilling and believable as the songs on my dad's Mahalia Jackson records.

Lord, let me believe again and be thrilled.

E: Do you want to be made well? (John 5:6b) I hear Christ asking this when I'm ill, hurt, resentful, or stuck in a rut.

Jesus, only say the word, and I will be healed.

R: Stand up, take your mat, and walk. (John 5:8b)
My friend, a tough man weakened by illness, can stand tall and serve the Lord because he is forgiven.
Forgive us, Jesus. We want to stand.

R: Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat? (John 6:5b) "Mom, remember when you found only two hot dogs in the refrigerator for dinner?" my children ask. To their delight, I sliced them and made hot dog pancakes.
Help us see how we can multiply food for the hungry.

E: When he had given thanks, he distributed the loaves to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. (John 6:11) Multiplying five loaves and two fish into a meal for 5,000 is not the kind of math problem I understand.
God, thanks for the Holy Spirit school of math.

E: I am the bread of life . . . anyone who comes to me I will never drive away. (John 6:35a, 37b) Amid the daily rejections of automated voice mail, closed doors, and irritable replies, Jesus alone will never drive us away.
Bread of life, fill us with your welcoming spirit.

R: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (John 6:68b) How can we leave you? We are helpless without you.
Jesus, we want to sit at your feet and listen to your words.

R: Are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath? (John 7:23b) Have you ever worked for a micro-manager? The perfectionism

and excessive attention to detail rob the day's work of creativity and love.

God of Love, keep our eyes on your children and not on stifling rules.

E: Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment. (John 7:24) Out of love and respect for ourselves and others, we should get to know the facts as we see them and the people as they see themselves.
Help us listen to your Spirit, even when it rankles.

E: Let anyone who is thirsty come to me. (John 7:37b) After working in the hot sun, a long drink of water is all I want.
Living water, you are all I need.

R: Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water. (John 7:38b) A kindergartener had me at my wit's end. I prayed, "God, I cannot do this. You show me the way." And God did.
Holy Spirit, flow from our hearts.

R: Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. (John 8:7b) We had a single innocent date. Later when I saw a newspaper picture of him with his wife and children, I was devastated.
Help us to not throw stones of criticism and judgment.

E: Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on, do not sin again. (John 8:11b) Jesus didn't come to shame us for our wrongs but to rescue us from our empty longings.
Thank you for your forgiveness, so undeserved.

R: If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly. (John 10:24b)

Jesus was not what they expected!

Jesus, help us to recognize you.

E: My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. (John 10:27) A baby recognizes the sound of her mother's voice and follows it.

Mother God, we are your children.

R: I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live. (John 11:25b) As our mother lay dying in the hospital, we all joined hands and sang the hymn, "Thank you, Lord."

You are here to give us life, today and always.

Thank you, Jesus!

E: Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? (John 11:26) When death stares at us from antiseptic hospital beds and the dusty rubble of collapsed buildings, do we still believe?

Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief.

R: Mary anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. (John 12:3a) When I was little, my mother brushed my hair and bathed me gently. It was a sign of love just as Mary's anointing of Jesus was.

Jesus, we love you and adore you.

E: Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me. (John 12:7) Sometimes it's nice to pamper a loved one. We may not get the chance later.

God, help us to share your gifts.

R: The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. (John 12:23) They arrested, tried, and executed him as if he were a common criminal. I see degradation; Jesus sees glory.

Lord, when events take a turn for the worst, help me to see your glory.

E: Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12:24) When asked to mentor someone, I resisted, thinking, "Great, another thing to do." But it produced a warm friendship.

Christ, you died to give us life; help us give that life to others.

E: I give you a new commandment that you love one another. (John 13:34a) Think of the people in your life, even those you don't like. How many ways can you find to show them love?

Help me love others more.

R: By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:35) At our church we share the peace with warm greetings and heartfelt expressions of concern.

Fill us with your love, O God, and go with us into the world.

Elizabeth Hunter attends Holy Family Lutheran Church in Chicago, along with her mother, Ruth. She is a section editor for the *The Lutheran* magazine. Ruth is the mother of three adult children, a kindergarten teacher in Chicago, and a lifelong Sunday School student and teacher.



MOTHERING SEASONS

Mothers, Children, and Forgiveness

by Kirsi Stjerna

A MOTHER WHO KILLED HER FIVE CHILDREN LAST SUMMER BY DROWNING THEM SENT SHOCK WAVES AROUND THE NATION. AN UNIMAGINABLE THING TO DO—AND YET IT HAPPENS MORE OFTEN THAN WE KNOW. HOW COULD A MOTHER DO SUCH A THING TO HER OWN CHILD? IS THERE ANYTHING MORE EVIL THAN THAT, WE WONDER.

Even in fairy tales we don't see really evil mothers. Wicked stepmothers, yes, but the "real" mothers never get really mad. They control their tongues and they never totally flip out. They never hurt their children, never leave them, never hate them, and never, ever kill them. They are perfect, right?

This is the fairy tale. The reality is that we mothers are as far from that perfection as we are from having Barbie-doll figures post-pregnancy. Besides, the notion of perfect motherhood calls for serious redefinition. For the most part, even modern mothers can still be prisoners of patriarchal, sexist notions of parenthood that place the heftiest burden of childrearing on the sex that physically gave birth (as if that weren't enough). No wonder some women are overwhelmed. Most of the breakdowns happen privately; only the most horrible make the national news.

Before I had children and would read stories of women who, in anger, harmed their children, my heart went out to the children. I had little understanding for the mothers. With six years of mothering

under my belt and friendships with fellow parents, I can see how things can happen. When you are out of resources and pushed into a corner, you can snap. You realize, to your horror, that you may be capable of doing violent things—to a person much smaller than you. And if you do slip, you cannot reverse what you just did. You hate yourself. The worse the thing you did, the more you want to punish yourself. Often mothers who have killed their children then try to kill themselves. Guilt—we all know how that feels, even when we haven't killed or hurt someone we love.

We all lose our cool at times. There's a certain private satisfaction in witnessing a friend—an "ideal mother"—losing it and shedding tears of frustration when trying to reason with her about-to-take-over children. Those moments, as humiliating as they are, reveal something very essential about motherhood, about humanity, and about our need for grace and forgiveness. That is what makes mothering divine, sacred—not our perfection but the abundance of grace that embraces our humanity. It's as if amniotic fluid surrounds both the mother and the child, manifested especially in those embodiments of grace, the people who support us in our parenting.

Kirsi Stjerna is assistant professor of Reformation church history at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Penn.

Reach Out and Touch Whom?

by Julie B. Sevig



CONFESSION: These are all statements I've made. In fact, they are probably kinder, gentler versions of statements I've made. If the saying "those who can't, teach" is true, then that is indeed why I am writing about loving the seemingly unlovable.

I have no doubt that you are better than I am at reaching out. You might seek out the new person at Sunday worship—not to add another number to your rolls but to sincerely welcome another into the community of faith. You may invite a new neighbor over for coffee without so much as a fleeting thought that now you'll have one more possible person from whom to borrow sugar; you do it just because that's

what neighbors do. And back in your schooldays, you probably said hello to—and even made friends with—those classmates others made fun of.

Although I'm tempted to cry out, "But I'm an introvert!" and take myself off the hook, I know there's more to it than that. Anyone who's taken a psychology class (or listened to a wise mother) knows that when we criticize another, out loud or not—as in "that is just *not* a good look for her"—it is because we may not be feeling all that good about ourselves. We think nasty thoughts or say catty things to build up our own self-esteem. Though there's truth to this, I also think that sometimes we

simply find other people annoying. We just don't like them.

But all too often we not only act inhospitably, we ignore others' loneliness or pain. To be fair, we're otherwise nice people. I'm a nice person. I'm a native of Minnesota, the state that prides itself on its niceness.

For many of us, that tendency to be inhospitable or ignore others has to do with a comfort zone that we just don't want penetrated. We like the familiarity of those we know, the groups with which we run. We love the way things are. Perhaps we simply don't want to be bothered.

But then I think of the women I've known who've demonstrated another, better way: Grace, the woman at my childhood church who made time for everyone, especially the elderly; Ruth, our across-the-street neighbor who made time for visits with me over endless after-school snacks; and Liz, who when she has a conflict with colleagues, friends, or strangers, prays for them and asks God to guide her own thoughts, words, and actions.

I may not be like Grace, Ruth, or Liz, but I'm smart enough to know that the pay-off for such hospitality—for such genuine love—is immeasurable.

In this season of Epiphany, one way for me to shed light is to do what all good people of faith should do often: Turn to the scriptures and pray. And then turn to my neighbor. I will return to the scriptures, and I'll ask these ancestors of faith to teach me again:

- Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 11:46–52). This noisy blind beggar at the gates of Jericho can teach me a thing or two about persistence and praise.
- The bent-over woman (Luke 13:10–17). After 18 years of looking at her feet, this remarkable woman might be able to tell me what it's been like to live with the burdens of the world on her back, and what it's like to stand tall with a new view of others.

- The paralytic (Mark 2:1–12). This man whose friends are so loyal and clever can remind me how crucial it is to be both helper and one who graciously receives the help and care of others.
- The Samaritan woman (John 4:1–42). This woman of great honesty and courage may tell me the most about what it's like to be an outsider.

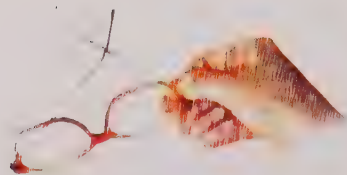
Then I'll move on to the others, because there are enough characters and days to go around as we move into Lent, a season in which vulnerability is a strength, not a weakness: the man with the unclean spirit, the leper, the tax collector Zacchaeus, the woman with the flow of blood, the prodigal son and his jealous brother, doubting disciples, and the widow who gave all that she had.

This character study may or may not make me more loving of the quirky outsider. But it will keep me close to the one who can teach and transform me because he is the expert at loving the unlovable: Jesus Christ. Jesus wasn't bothered by group dynamics or oddities that would send us to another pew or table. Quite the contrary.

And if I'm really up for transformation, I'll remember that I am no different than the people Jesus encountered and the ones I am tempted to ignore or judge. For you and I, too, are the unlovable—with all our idiosyncrasies and insecurities, bad habits and bad hair days.

So we leave our prayer, study, and worship life strengthened and determined to love others—even those people we don't think we'd like—not only because Christ commanded it but because someone first loved us: our good and gracious God.

Julie B. Sevig is a section editor for *The Lutheran* magazine and a member of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Chicago.



READER CALL

A Meaningful Valentine's Day?

Forty-six years is a long time between sisters' hugs. Twenty years is a long time between sisters' conversations. But that is how long my sister was lost to me. She was born into our father's first family, and I was the first child of his second family. She didn't know I existed until our father died when I was almost four years old. Overcoming her shock, anger, and sense of betrayal, my sister, 20 years my elder, brought her own infant son to meet his little aunt. That was our first in-person meeting and our last—until Valentine's Day 2000.

After our father died, my mother remarried, and our new family moved. Although I saw our grandmother periodically, I never ran into my big sister while visiting. When I was 30, I took my children to meet my father's sister. During that visit I told my aunt I'd like to get to know my big sister, and asked her to pass on my phone number if she'd like to be in touch. We spoke once. She moved and we moved, and we lost track of each other again.

A recent move to the East Coast prompted me to look up my big sister where I thought she was living, in New Jersey. On Valentine's Day 2000, I booted up my computer and began searching. Using a "people finder" search engine, I entered my sister's name and New Jersey. Nothing. I tried again, with just her name. Still nothing. The third time's the charm, I thought. So I input her first ini-

tial and last name and came up with three hits, one for her name. This marvelous technology gave me no address, but it did give me a telephone number.

I hesitantly dialed the number on the screen. Four rings later, I heard a recorded voice, a voice I remembered from 20 years in the past! "Hi, this is Shirley. Leave a message and I'll get back to you." Now what?! I identified myself and told the machine if its owner was the other daughter of our father, and if she'd like to be in touch, she could reach me at my phone number, and I hoped she would. And then I waited.

That evening, the phone rang—the first time it had rung all day. On the other end was this excited woman shouting my name over and over again: "I can't believe you found me!" she shouted. She had been praying for our reunion for years. She had just learned how to use a computer, and she was going to learn how to track me down. But, Valentine's Day and a little perseverance brought us together—well, with some urging from above and lots of prayer!

Now my sister and I talk on the phone and email regularly, and we've seen each other twice since that day of reunion, of renewed love and answered prayers. Valentine's Day isn't just for lovers, it's for the love that binds us to family, too.

The Rev. Linda Kraft—Stafford Springs, Connecticut

Carol and I were both June brides in the summer of 1960. We lived side by side in the small town where our husbands and I were beginning our teaching careers. Eight months later, it was February and Valentine's Day was nearing. I asked Carol if she thought Kirk would think that was important. She said, "Probably not. He's not big on such things." This put me on a mission. The very next day, during school lunch hour, I reminded Kirk that we girls love special-occasion surprises.

Carol came to my house on February 15. "You'll never guess what happened," she said with a hint of excitement in her voice. "I found a lovely heart box of chocolates under my pillow last evening! Kirk remembered!" She shared the sweets, and we rejoiced together. I didn't say a word about where the motivation for the gift might have come.

Time passed and we two young couples moved on to other towns and other jobs. Over the years, however, we maintained and treasured our friendship and the many good times we'd shared as neighbors. Years later, we met as families. As we reminisced together, the subject of the first valentine came up. We discovered that well-chosen cards, cakes, coffee mugs, jewelry, and dinners represented only a few of the love exchanges that Valentine's Day had brought forth in our households.

Now in 2002, Valentine's Day is still a time when we find joy in expressing our care within the family and beyond. Through many years in school work, I have always been amazed at how much happiness the children get from the little cards and party on that day. I'm glad such a day is part of our calendar! Now retired, I'm thankful for time to share God's peace and love in unexpected places, with old and young, near and far. Valentine's Day is a meaningful day to me!

Lorraine Meland—Wallace, South Dakota



For Reader Call topics and deadlines, see page 51.

Many of our New Year's resolutions center on those dearest to us. We resolve to be better spouses, parents, children, friends. But what about our relationship with God? Could we resolve this year to work on relating to God in ways more like the ways we relate to those dearest to us?

For some of us, this is an uncomfortable idea. For so long, we've been taught, "I cannot, by my own understanding or effort, believe in Jesus or come to him" (*Luther's Small Catechism*). We know that God does all the work: "The Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with the Spirit's gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith" (*Luther's Small Catechism*). Lest we yield to the temptation to seek to earn our way to heaven, we tend to leave it all up to God. But there is a difference

It's one thing to know in our heads that we can pursue an intimate relationship with God. It's quite another to believe it in our hearts and act upon it. A way to make our relationship with God more personal and more fulfilling is to make it more active. Check in with God as you would with someone close to you. Make a time to get together with God as you would with a friend. Even Jesus set special time aside to spend with God (Mark 1:35–39).

In prayer, move beyond asking to sharing what's happening in your life and how you feel about it. Make a point of listening to what God is sharing with you, whether through your inner voice, the voices of others, or the voice of God's word. Be sensitive to the time of day when you're most attuned to God's presence—in the shower, exercising, or cooking dinner.

Your Spiritual Resolution for 2002

BE MORE HONEST WITH GOD

by Craig A. Satterlee

between attempting to earn a relationship with God and celebrating the intimate relationship that God in Christ gives us.

The wonder of the gospel is that the Creator of the universe loves us so much that God dared to take on our form in order to join us in the whole of our life, and even death. In Christ, we are bold to proclaim that God knows us by name, claims us as God's own, and has a personal relationship with us. Taking this relationship seriously, cherishing it, invites us—even calls us—to take responsibility for maintaining a healthy personal relationship with God. The first step in resolving to spend this year relating to God as we would to those dearest to us is to recognize that God desires to have this kind of relationship with us—and we can pursue it.

Explore new things for you and God to do together. Of course, there are traditional activities, including prayer, reading scripture, and performing acts of Christian service. How about writing letters to God, singing to God, sewing, sketching, or working in the garden for God? Our daily activities, and especially the things we enjoy most, become opportunities to celebrate our personal relationship with God when we do them mindful that we are in God's presence and as a response to God's love.

Perhaps the most difficult part of having an intimate relationship with God is being honest. So often we screen what we share with God, only allowing God in on the parts of ourselves with which we are comfortable. Or when tragedy strikes, we say and do things that spare and protect God

**GOD WILL UNINTENTIONALLY
BUT INEVITABLY HURT, ANGER,
AND DISAPPOINT US. IN CHRIST
WE CAN BE HONEST WITH GOD.**



from our questions and feelings. Or we pray and we pray and the answer is no—or even worse, there seems to be no answer, only silence. How could our all-powerful, all-loving God disappoint us so?

When God hurts, angers, or disappoints us, we often hide behind sayings that really don't help us to feel better. For example, "Everything happens for a reason." "God doesn't give any burden bigger than what we can bear." Hold it—some things that happen to us are just plain unreasonable! And what kind of God would give any burden at all? Isn't life hard enough? God doesn't want us to screen our thoughts and feelings, and God certainly doesn't need our protection. Let us remember Jesus' instruction to ask, seek, and knock. Let us also recall Jesus teaching to pester—even harass—God, as the widow pestered the unrighteous judge (Luke 18:1–8).

The Bible is filled with people who are honest and even frank with God about their thoughts and feelings. Even Jesus could pray, "Not what I want, but what you want," only after he had shared his agony with God in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32–42). As in any personal relationship, God will unintentionally but inevitably hurt, anger, and disappoint us. In Christ we can be honest with God. And as Christ forgives us, we can find the power to forgive even God.

Relationships become personal and meaningful only when we give one another the power to hurt and to be hurt. On the cross God gave us the power to hurt God. In the resurrection God declared that, no matter how we hurt God, God will never turn away from us. God loves us this deeply and personally. And God desires that we resolve to love God the same.

The Rev. Craig A. Satterlee, Ph.D., is Axel Jacob and Gerda Maria (Swanson) Carlson Assistant Professor of Homiletics at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.



IDEANET

Happy Birthday, *LWT*

Memories from Nancy Stelling, first editor of LWT

Dear *LWT*,

So this January/February 2002 issue marks the beginning of your 15th year. How did that happen so quickly? How did you grow from a gleam in the eyes of those who planned you back in the mid-1980s to a lively, faith-filled teenager?

As someone who watched you grow over the years, I'm delighted to send you some words of remembrance . . . and encouragement for the future.

What fond memories you provoke! These I especially recall:

Striking covers such as "Lorna," picturing a special young adult to underscore the theme "Affirming Individual Worth" (June '89), and "Spirited Sisters," with its snapshots of "sisters of all ages" celebrating life (June '98).

Solid Bible studies that inspired Christine Grumm (the first vice president of our new church) to call women who used the studies "the best theologians in the ELCA." Remember how much we all learned from that toughest of all books—Revelation?

Calls to action, especially the call to "ban the Styrofoam cup." Remember how we learned later that we should have called it a "plastic foam cup"?

Many fine authors so willing to share their faith stories—both "Reader Call" writers and bigger names

(though still humble people) like Martin Marty and Joan Chittister.

The interactive approach as seen in the "Heaven and Hell Survey" (July/August '93), the "God blesses me with family . . ." color-me card (May '00), and the three-part Bible study using *Lectio Divina* (June and July/August '00). How great for all of us to learn that God really means it when God says we are to have Sabbath rest!

***LWT*'s spirited nature**, as shown in Sister Carol Frances Jegen's series on spirituality. She defines spirituality as "the way we cooperate with the movements of the Holy Spirit in our lives" and explores the four aspects of spirituality as time and space for God, beauty, playfulness, and concern for the poor and marginalized (January–April '89). This series was so formative in my life that I still use it as a basis for workshops on spirituality today. I also recall your use of the meditative tool, the labyrinth (March '99 cover), which found its way to the 1999 St. Louis Triennial Convention—and into the faith lives of many.

Faithful readers—probably the best feature of the magazine—willing to be touched by the words of information and inspiration, comfort and challenge, that you sought to give them. Those readers were also willing to write letters and share their thoughts and reactions to articles because they care about *LWT* and think of you as "their magazine."

So, *LWT*, keep up the good work! You've grown now to a new size, with full color and a one-size readable type to serve all.

By God's grace you have a great past. And a great future stands before you—because you have a great God to love, share, and tell others about. To God be all the glory.

God's peace,

Nancy J. Stelling—Editor, 1988–2000

What We Love about *LWT*

- The encouragement and knowledge I obtain.
- Being inspired and enlightened each month while reading great articles and devotions and Bible studies.
- The “IdeaNet,” where units share their ideas and ways of showing God's love.
- Being informed of women's events all over our country. This is why each year I purchase a subscription for each of my daughters and daughters-in-law. (And I actually see them being used!) Praise God for his constant love and generous heart. May God continue to bless our *LWT* into the next generation.

Pat Kolpin—Toledo, Iowa

I love reading the very relevant articles written by laywomen. While all the articles are very meaningful, as they are written by religious professionals with extensive training, sometimes a non-professional can express something better for a large majority of women.

Mary Lose—Belleville, Texas

A Beautiful Tribute

Just a line to let you know my wife enjoyed *Lutheran Woman Today*. Thank you. She is gone now to live with the Father as of July 30, 2001. Again, thank you. She was a good Christian woman. Her husband,

Marvin Woolley—Jackson Center, Ohio

Sold on No Sales

Our unit decided to have a “No-Bake No-Craft Sale” rather than the traditional bake/craft sale. We sent a letter to all the women in the congregation asking them to determine a cash value for the baking or crafts they would have donated, and donate that cash value. With limited time and the competition from other sales in the community, the women responded generously! This sale made more for missions than any previous actual sales. We're doing our third “No-Bake No-Craft Sale” in 2001—back by popular demand!

Kathy Bolin—Rochester, Minnesota

Bethel Women of the ELCA

Smart Mailing Idea

A number of our readers participate in Secret Prayer Sister mailings and other similar programs. The idea is to send encouraging notes, thoughts, or prayers to a specific person. What keeps it a secret is generally not including a return address on the envelope.

In light of recent warnings about opening mail without a return address, a reader shared with us the following idea.

Since no return address is used for Secret Prayer Sister mailings, we are telling the women at our church to use the church address for the return address. SWO's that have Secret Prayer Sisters could use one of the president's or some other board member's address. (Please make sure your SWO president or board member grants their permission for this before you begin.)

This should remedy the situation and still allow these uplifting programs to continue without a hitch.

Wanda Hurtgen—St. Paul SWO



A breathtaking view of Jerusalem.

A Brief History of Palestine

by Said Ailabouni

PALESTINIANS ARE ARABS WHO trace their presence in the Holy Land back to even before the time of Jesus, to Abraham. Christian Palestinians, including Lutherans, trace their roots back to Pentecost. Muslim Palestinians trace their history back to AD 637.

Palestinians take pride in their history of centuries of peaceful coexistence among Christians, Muslims, and Jews. The Palestinians view the genesis of the present conflict in the Middle East not in them, but in Zionism.

Zionism began in the late 19th century as a global movement to establish a home for the Jews in Palestine, through land acquisition

and immigration from all over the world. At that time, however, Palestine was inhabited primarily by Arab Palestinians. In 1897, when the first Zionist Congress was convened in Basel, Switzerland, seven percent of the population in Palestine were Jews. They owned two percent of the land. The rest of the population were Arabs (12 percent Christian and 88 percent Muslim).

Our Forgotten Sisters in Palestine

One Woman Shares her Vision of Hope

The following is an interview with Viola Raheb, a Palestinian Lutheran educator and advocate for peace. She shares her story with us so that we might have a better, more complete understanding of daily life in the Middle East, and the hopes of those who dare to dream.

—the Editors

After the end of World War I, the Palestinians revolted against the presence of the British army on their land as well as the increased immigration of Jews to Palestine. In November 1947, the United Nations resolved to end the conflict by partitioning the country into Jewish and Arab states, against the opposition of Palestinians and Arab countries. For the Palestinians, this partitioning was not a compromise—

it increased eightfold the amount of land belonging to the Jewish population, to about 55 percent of the country.

The British chose to end their mandate over Palestine on May 15, 1948. On that same day, the State of Israel declared its independence. The armies of neighboring Arab countries intervened in response to the routing of the Palestinians, but their involvement was ineffective.

LWT: Where did you grow up?

I was born in Bethlehem in 1969 to a Palestinian Christian Lutheran family. We're a small family in a Palestinian context—myself and one older brother, who is pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. I lived the majority of my life there until I went to do my studies in Germany. I've been back in Palestine working there since 1995.

LWT: What was your childhood like?

I was born after the occupation of 1967, so I grew up within the context of occupation. A military presence

In the end, the Israeli army conquered 77 percent of Palestine, forcing 60 percent of the population (about 750,000 men, women and children) to become refugees in neighboring countries. Over 400 Palestinian villages were totally destroyed and no longer exist today.

The Palestinians call this moment in their history the *nakba* (the catastrophe).



Viola, center, with friend Barbara and niece Tala.

has always been a part of life—seeing heavily equipped soldiers all over the place. Yet I grew up well.

When I was growing up, it was forbidden to use the word “Palestine” or to get to know anything about our own history, to know anything of our literature

or lyrics. It was forbidden to read books on Palestine.

I lived on the small street as a child where I’m back living now. It is next to the Church of the Nativity, and it’s the route all pilgrims take when they come to the Holy Land. I grew up hearing Christmas carols even in the middle of August. It shaped my picture of what pilgrims are looking for—and are never able to find because they are looking in the wrong place for it. They were looking for Jesus in the buildings and stones rather than in the living stones of the Holy Land.

I finished high school in 1987, when the first Intifada (uprising) started. Schools were closed down for almost three years, and I started teaching in

homes so that children would not be illiterate. Then I went to Germany for six years and came back when the peace process started. And now, I am living in the context of a second Intifada.

I didn’t have a childhood where I could just be innocent and play. Politics was our daily bread, shaping my childhood memories.

LWT: Was that the most influential part of growing up, or do other things stand out?

One of the things that really impacted me was when two classmates were jailed for a year for reading Palestinian literature. We were 16. I couldn’t comprehend what they had done wrong to be sentenced to jail just for reading a book. A few years later, one of the two was assassinated in the first Intifada.

It was too early—at 16, you’re not at an age to realize what risk means. It hits you so hard all of a sudden your whole world collapses. And then you ask yourself, “Where is my place in all of this?” This was one of the things that made me decide to do what I’m doing now, advocacy work. I know it is so important to make people know the story and not be silenced by the media.

It destroyed their hope of having an independent Palestinian country where Jews, Muslims, and Christians could live together in harmony. It left them homeless, their land occupied.

Their condition worsened after the June 1967 war, when Israel captured East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Currently, 400,000 Israeli citizens live in settlements on

land captured in 1967. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Arabs continue to see more and more of their land confiscated, their olive trees and fruit trees destroyed by the thousands, their homes demolished, their freedom of movement curtailed, and their ability to earn a living, attend school, or harvest their fields severely limited.

The conditions of the occupa-

tion by the Israeli army have left many Palestinians feeling hopeless and without a future. The failure of the Oslo peace accords also dashed their dreams for an independent state that would peacefully exist next to Israel.

The Palestinians want only 23 percent of their original land back, the land occupied in the 1967 war. They want to live on it in dignity and freedom.

LWT: It gave you the lens that you see things through.

It made me realize that you have to ask yourself whether you want your soul to die under occupation, and just be concerned about the dishwashing and the cooking, or whether you want to hold on to who you are in your inner self. And with that, maybe to risk so many things that matter to you.

LWT: Can you share with us your perspective of the way things are among the people of Palestine, their intentions and their everyday lives?

One of the most difficult things to make people understand is what occupation really means. It's so far from reality in the States. Occupation for me is not so much an issue of the military presence. It's about living where you cannot travel without a permit, where you cannot go back to your home country unless you have a permit. Where you can lose your citizenship if you stay longer than the permit allows. It's about living in a city where freedom of movement is limited to a two-kilometer radius, where often I cannot even visit friends or family because the road would just end with a blockade or an Israeli military checkpoint.

Occupation for me is about living in a country where water is a political tool, where we get water once every two or three weeks. It is about people who cannot get medical treatment because Israeli checkpoints prohibit them from reaching hospitals in Jerusalem. It's about not being able to work in my office, which is only eight kilometers away from where I live, for the last six years. Occupation for me is about being harassed at every checkpoint and at the airport just for being who I am.

In the last few months it's been about not being able to sleep because bombings go on from early afternoon until early morning. It's about a context where everything you own can be confiscated, and you can do nothing about it.

What really matters about occupation is that it goes right to the heart of basic human rights in everyday life. People are not so concerned about politics—they are concerned about being able to go to work. At the moment we have 80 percent unemployment in Bethlehem—not because the people don't have jobs, but because they either cannot get to their jobs or they live on tourism, and there is currently no tourism.

This is what daily life is about. If you sleep, then you wake up wondering, how am I going to survive this thing? Will there be water? Will they cut off the electricity or the telephone lines? How far can I get today with my car? Can I get the supplies that I need, the medical treatment I need? Will my children come safe home from school, or will there be bombing before they return home? These are the kinds of things that matter in our circumstances.

It's about not being able to plan. In the States you plan for years ahead, but I can't plan what I will do tomorrow. And so we live from moment to moment. I have left home and then found out that all possibilities of going back are blocked. I can't think about five days ahead when I'm just trying to get back home.

LWT: It must be an exhausting way to live. How do you cling to hope?

It's tough to live in the context we live in. It makes me sad to see that people don't know what we are going through. It makes me even sadder that they don't know that we are even here. You feel left alone, trying not to drown in the midst of all this hopelessness.

This is why I think it is important to see sometimes that hope is not something you can preach about, where people get it like an adrenaline rush and they are so happy and thrilled—this is not about that. This is about something that keeps you waking up every morning, makes you go to work in spite of all that is happening around you.

LWT: Because we only know what our media tell us, it's important to talk about this. What do you think is achievable for the future of Israel and Palestine?

One has to distinguish between short-term and long-term. This is very hard, because we want to have something tangible to look to and say "in five years, in two years, this is what will happen." What keeps me going is to know that it's like the parable of the one who was planting seeds. This is all that we can do—plant seeds. We cannot predict if they will fall in good soil, if there will be enough rain, if they will ever bear fruit, or if they will ever make it.

In the short term, I think we're heading toward an apartheid system. I also think the situation will esca-

late in terms of violence. One plan that has been discussed is to divide the West Bank into 56 small homelands for Palestinians, surrounded by Israeli settlements—disconnect- ed from each other, and so economically with no future. If I were to look only at this, I don't think I would see any reason to continue being—not only here, but just being in general, because what kind of home would that be, what



A Bethlehem residence after heavy shelling in August 2001.

kind of country would we have?

In the long run, I think there is no other solution but to have both nations and all three religions find a way to coexist, to accept that wanting the right of existence for oneself is directly connected to the right of existence for the other. If it excludes anyone, it will not be possible. I think in the long run, there is no other way but to have two states or

two nations that exist next to each other. Many people think this is a naive vision, but it's not about loving one another—it's about accepting you even if I cannot love you. Not loving you doesn't mean I need to hit you or kill you.

There is no other way but to learn to survive together, not because we want to or even because we will be better human beings for it, but because the challenges we will be facing will make us have to. At the moment, water is a political tool. But we also know that in a few years there will be no water: It will either be gone or not good for human use. One state alone will not be able to find the solution. So the challenges that are ahead of us are forcing us to think more regionally and globally.

People think Israelis and Palestinians are so different, and that's why we cannot understand each other. I believe that we are very similar, to an extent that is frightening for many people—that's why it is so difficult to accept the other, because you see part of yourself when you look at the other. I think we need, as in psychotherapy, to acknowledge that we have a problem in order to be able to solve it. At the moment, we're in the stage of denial, hoping that it will solve itself. And so the treatment is a very long process. It can only start when we recognize that we do really have something to work on.

What keeps me going is that even if I will not live to see it, maybe the generation of my children or my grandchildren will experience peaceful coexistence. But the only way for them to experience that is if I commit myself to it today.

LWT: Readers are going to want to know if there is any way they can help you achieve this vision.

It's very important to work with the young generation at home. This is why I'm in the field of education. Those 12 to 15 years really shape you. It shapes

whether you will be a citizen, or in a dictator's regime, whether you learn to accept everything or whether you will be somebody who thinks critically and dares to challenge and question what is happening, to make an impact. I think that we can give hope to the young generation that it is worthwhile to invest in their country and in themselves. Then

we will have done a great deal for realizing that long-term process. If we can help them to see God's creation in the other, not dehumanizing the other, then we have done a great deal for reconciliation. And if we can help people to learn to plant trees at a time when bulldozers are pulling up trees, then I think we are giving peace a chance to become a reality.

When it comes to the United States, especially the women, what I hope for is that they realize that we do exist as their sisters, their often forgotten sisters. It hurts to be forgotten. Secondly, I wish for women there to reach out to these sisters—not only to know that they exist but to reach out to them. I think there is much that can be done, whether it's connecting organizations to women's groups, to churches, to women's magazines, or whatever. Thirdly, what is important is that women view this as a mutual relationship, because often people think that being Arab women, we have to learn from you—but I think it is a mutual relationship, where we both can learn from each other. I always say that you learn to know yourself better once you meet the other.



Israeli tanks surround Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation in August 2001.

What I wish for is a face-to-face encounter between women that would help them realize who they are and who the other is. Women are so creative and can think of so many things they can do then. I think in that sense, what I wish for is that when American women hear "Palestine," they have a name, a face, and a story to connect to.

LWT: You're right—who knows what Lutheran women will be up to once the seed is planted?

They've done some amazing things with all manner of issues.

For women who would like to know more, they can see our web site www.annadwa.org or www.holyland-lutherans.org and even email me at Vraheb@annadwa.org. Our web site is updated once a month. We also have a newsletter. Then they have contacts if they're organizing a pilgrimage or whatever.

LWT: Person by person, step by step, many things are possible. Please take a little hope from us.

I do.

Extremists for Love

by Lorna H. London

When I first sat down to write this article, I had all sorts of ideas about how I could convey to you my respect for two great people who changed the course of history. So I focused my research on the words and teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi, and drafted paragraphs about how they could serve as guides for our lives. I organized my thoughts into an essay outlining the need for peaceful, loving relationships with all people. I discussed how these two men, from widely different cultures, used their vision for a just society and their strong spiritual convictions to make positive changes in the world. I wrote of their perseverance, their strength, and their passionate commitment to the search for social justice.

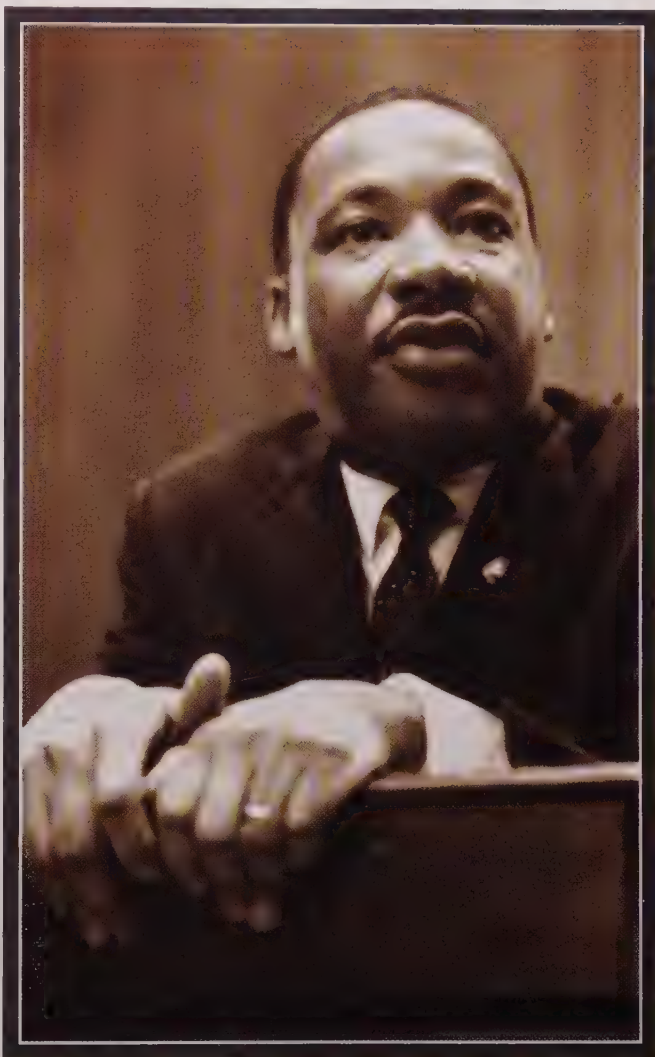
I WAS ALMOST FINISHED WITH THE ARTICLE and getting ready to submit it for publication when the unthinkable happened: Four hijacked U.S. planes were deliberately crashed, creating mass destruction that sent our country into deep shock and even despair. That day changed everything.

Who can erase the images of September 11, 2001? The horror replays over and over again in my mind, as if I'm reliving a bad dream. The idea of our country attacked by people who despise us leaves me numb. I'm grieving, as if I've lost something dear to me. As a psychologist, I understand the emotional response to grief: shock, anger, sadness, and ultimately acceptance. I understand that I'm feeling the shock now, which is slowly turning to anger. I find myself asking, how could such evil and hatred exist? How could so many innocent people lose their lives in something so cruel, so senseless? How will I ever come to accept this?

I am fortunate; I did not personally know anyone lost in that disaster of September 11. But what I did lose frightened me. I lost a sense of hope, a sense of security, a sense of peace. I used to walk through life with a Pollyanna-ish approach, always believing in the good of people. I lost some of that naïveté when the Twin Towers tumbled. How could I, or anyone else, go on with life when everything seemed so mundane, so pointless?

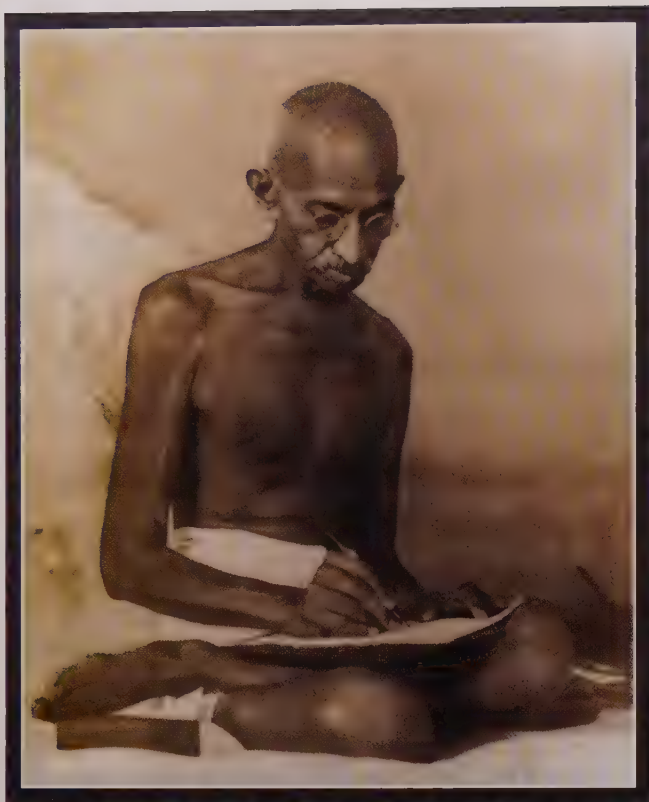
The next day, I sat down at my computer and stared at the words in front of me. It was impossible to concentrate. I kept hearing the news accounts on the television. With each passing hour, I began to feel more and more strongly something formerly foreign to me: hatred. I found myself hating the people who created this chaos. I wanted those terrorists to feel the pain my fellow Americans felt. I wanted them to cry the tears I cried.

As a psychologist, I cried, thinking about the enormous emotional impact this would have on all of America. As a woman, I cried as I heard story after story about the families searching for their loved ones,



praying that they weren't trapped beneath 110 stories' worth of concrete and steel. As a wife, I cried for the women praying that their husbands were running late for their meeting at the Pentagon, stuck in traffic miles away when the plane crashed into the building. As a mother, I cried for the children orphaned by this act of terrorism, and for my son, who one day will ask me, "Mommy, why is there such hatred in the world?"

How could I reconcile all of these feelings, and keep anger and hatred from taking over my life?



And what if King and Gandhi lived now? Would they continue to embrace their ideals of non-violent resistance? Certainly, they never experienced anything this tragic. Or did they?

Gandhi was a beacon of strength for India. He called on people to show peaceful resistance in their efforts to change the behavior of their oppressors. Similarly, during the Civil Rights era in the U.S., King encouraged people to embrace love, saying, "Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice—or will we be extremists for the cause of justice?" Even in his jail cell in Birmingham, during the height of the turbulent 1960s, King remained positive. Each, in his own horrific situation, remained a pillar of strength, determination, and compassion in his quest for social justice.

So what can we do to emulate these great people who left behind a rich legacy of spiritual resolve? The answer is simple: love. They believed in the

unconditional nature of love, and it was central to their being. It gave them the strength to embrace their convictions. They believed that peace could not be secured with weapons, and they believed that physical retaliation would merely exacerbate existing problems.

I don't know what tomorrow holds. What I do know is that King and Gandhi taught us through their words that hatred divides and love heals. At a time when darkness prevails in the land of the free, I am reminded of these words by King: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

We must not let hatred consume our lives. If we do, we are no better than those who terrorize us. We must find a way, using God's love and grace, to approach the challenges ahead with love and compassion. The outpouring of love that our fellow Americans have shown toward one another during this painful time has moved me. This is what can make a difference. The good that has arisen from this tragedy is in the altruism we've seen in the American people. My hope is that the goodness will not fade.

Gandhi showed great wisdom when he wrote: "Hatred ever kills; love never dies. Such is the vast difference between the two. What is obtained by love is retained for all time. What is obtained by hatred proves a burden in reality for it increases hatred."

Our burdens are many, and God asks us to turn over our burdens. If we can do that, more space opens in our hearts, allowing us to show love to those around us, maybe even to those who are different from us. Realizing that we have little control over some worldly matters can be frustrating. But we can change what's in our hearts. "You must be the change you wish to see in the world," said Gandhi.

Dr. Lorna H. London is assistant professor at Loyola University Chicago's School of Education.



Women of the ELCA Grants

Helping Build Healthy Families and Communities

by Doris Strieter

EVERY YEAR, Women of the ELCA grants are awarded to projects that help build healthy families and communities. In 2001, a total of \$184,118 was distributed to domestic and international ministries. These grants represent one way that the women's organization fulfills its commitment to promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.

This year, grants were awarded to two types of projects: intervention projects (those that assist women and children who are striving to overcome poverty and other crisis situations) and prevention projects (those that equip people to live healthy and productive lives). Priority was given to projects that were innovative, involved collaboration with other groups, addressed root causes, and had existing involvement with Women of the ELCA or the ELCA. Among the programs funded in 2001 are:

- a summer program in Oregon giving school-age children experience in conflict resolution
- transitional housing and supportive services for "working poor" families in Minnesota
- a job-training program for women living in poverty in Texas
- housing and counseling for women recently released from prison in Illinois
- a teen pregnancy prevention program in New York
- a community-development ministry in Michigan that supports family training for home ownership
- a "Safe Haven for Children" congregation in Pennsylvania offering a summer reading program
- a teen leadership circle in South Carolina that pairs teen moms with mentors from local churches
- 20 different programs supporting women in Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, Croatia, Peru, El Salvador, Palestine, and India

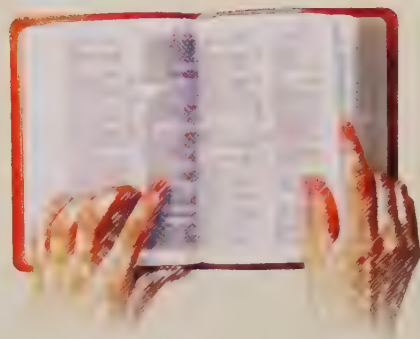
Because of generous gifts from women around the country, the grants program has awarded more than \$2 million dollars since 1988. Sometimes we may wonder whether an individual gift makes much of a difference. It does, because collectively—with each one doing her part—women *do* make a difference for the recipients of financial support. Our love and the sharing of our gifts touches their lives.

Ongoing contributions will ensure that Women of the ELCA can increase its efforts to build healthy families and communities. To contribute, make checks payable to Women of the ELCA, Program No. 528 (see address below).

Grants criteria and application forms for the year 2002 are available from the Women of the ELCA Grants Program at www.elca.org/wo/ or by calling 800-638-3522, ext. 2747, or by writing Women of the ELCA Grants Program, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189. Completed applications must be received on or before February 15, 2002.

Session 5

In Due Season



by James Arne Nestingen

Study Text

1 Kings 17:8-16; Luke 1:46-55

The Fourth Petition

Give us today our daily bread.

What is this?

Answer: In fact, God gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people, but we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving. (from *Luther's Small Catechism*)

What then does "daily bread" mean?

Answer: Everything our bodies need, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, fields, livestock, money, property, an upright spouse, upright children, upright workers, upright and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, decency, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like. (from *Luther's Small Catechism*)

Memory Verse

"These all look to you to give them their food in due season." (Psalm 104:27)

Overview

God's generosity knows no limit, providing us with everything we need. In the Fourth Petition, we pray for the grace to recognize this as we take part in the distribution.

Opening

"Now thank we all our God With hearts and hands and voices, Who wondrous things has done, In whom

this world rejoices; Who from our mothers' arms, Has blest us on our way With countless gifts of love, And still is ours today." ("Now Thank We All Our God," *Lutheran Book of Worship* 533)

Turning the Corner

There is a difference between the first and second parts of the Lord's Prayer. In the first part, we pray for ourselves in relation to God: We pray for God's word, for faith, and for protection. In the second part, we pray for ourselves in relation to our neighbors and for the necessities of daily life in family and community: daily bread, forgiveness, more help in temptation, and finally, deliverance from evil.

It is helpful to divide the Lord's Prayer this way, but this division is a little too neat: Everything we pray for in the second part of the prayer happens in relationship with God too. Even so, it is still helpful to see these differences between the first and second parts.

1. **Take a look at the first and second parts of the Lord's Prayer. Are there any differences that you notice?**

Bare Cupboards

Read 1 Kings 17:8–16. Maybe the opening words of Martin Luther's explanation, "God gives daily bread without our prayer," would have come as a surprise to the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17). She was anticipating starvation for both her son and herself. In fact, to her, Elijah's visit would have been just another in a long line of nearly impossible burdens.

Drought had created a difficult situation for everyone, but for marginalized people, as this

widow surely was, it would have been even worse. Elijah himself had been living in a cave until his water supply dried up. With no rain, there had been no crops for some years, and so there was little bread.

2. **To this day, in some cultures, women are in charge of fire and food. Where does this widow fit in this arrangement? What does it say about the standing of women?**

The widow of Zarephath tells Elijah that she is preparing a last meal for her son and herself.

3. **What do you suppose she was feeling at this time? Was she suicidal? What basis did she have for hope?**

Feeding the Hungry

Hope has a strange way of looking the facts in the eye and seeing beyond them. Prosperous people will ask, "Doesn't world hunger show that God doesn't give daily bread to all?", all the while worrying about their own diets. People who regularly live with drought and famine are able to see beyond the facts to God's goodness.

4. **Read Psalm 33:18–19 and Psalm 34:10, two passages that speak to people living with drought. What does God promise? Compare these passages with John 6:35. Does the promise of spiritual bread have anything to do with flour and yeast?**

Under the sign of a nuisance, God fed the widow of Zarephath and her son. Having gathered her firewood, she was preparing to go home

when Elijah approached her. The scene is similar to one in Genesis 24, when Abraham's servant met Rebekah.

This is very much like what happens daily, even now, in sub-Saharan Africa, India, and other parts of the world where old divisions of labor between the sexes continue.

The widow may have felt put upon, but there is a way the story turns over here: She has at least a little to eat and Elijah is asking. In the end, the story reverses completely. Even without her asking, Elijah does the feeding.

5. **Read the Magnificat, Mary's song, in Luke 1:46–55 (especially verses 51–55). According to Mary, how does God deal with the high and mighty? What does this suggest about the role reversals in the story? What does verse 53 have to say about disparities of power and finance?**

The promise that God made through Elijah to the widow of Zarephath was unusual in that it had a limit. This limit was stated in both the promise itself and in the description of the consequence (Ezekiel 17:14, 16).

6. **What was the limit? Did the limit mean that God would stop feeding the widow and her son at that time? Where would she turn when Elijah's promise ends?**

By looking for God in what we think of as spiritual and extraordinary, we sometimes miss the common ways in which God works in our lives. Food comes to us through what Martin Luther called "God's hands or channels": farms, grocers, bakers, and the everyday table.

By putting a limit on the promise, Elijah is directing the widow back from the extraordinary (the never-empty jug, the ever-supplying canister) to the ordinary. When the rains return, so will the crops; so will threshing, milling, and everything else.

7. **List some of the ordinary ways that God provides what our bodies need. Name some ways in which you are also a provider, a channel through which God works.**

God gives people more than they need so that they can share with those who have less. One of the extraordinary means God uses is Lutheran World Relief, an organization in which many Women of the ELCA participate by making quilts. It is known the world over for its efficiency and effectiveness, and for keeping administrative costs to a minimum.

There are many other such programs, including the ELCA's World Hunger office which provides some of the funding for LWR.

Grace and Gratitude

In Martin Luther's explanation of the Fourth Petition, he shifts the focus from daily bread to our realization of God's never-failing supply, that "we ask in this prayer that God cause us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving."

As both Martin Luther and the apostle Paul see it, the opposite of gratitude is not ingratitude, but something closely related: boasting. Boastfulness always shows up when there is credit to be dished out. It says, "Yes, isn't that nice? And I did it all by myself, with just these two little hands."

But more than that, there is the deeper boasting hidden in the tempter's voice in the Garden of Eden: "You shall not die." This is the conviction that we are our own projects, that life is what we make it, that given the right resources and a few breaks, we can have it the way we want it with minimal help from either God or neighbor.

This is not simply the bragging that adorns itself with blue ribbons, all of which are easy to see. Rather, it more subtly expresses itself in the fear of looking bad, in the desire to go it alone, in the feeling of having been overlooked, in the sense that the only way to be safe is to withdraw in self-protection.

8. **Sometimes boastfulness is active, even aggressive; sometimes it is passive, or withdrawing. Identify some examples of both. How are they harmful?**

Pulling Bread from our Famines

Sometimes disasters—trouble in the family, a drought, a lost job, serious illness—are so overwhelming that they are all we can see. But after the fact, it is often possible to look back and see something good in the experience, however painful that experience may have been.

There is a daily dying, a loss of control, a feeling that everything has gotten out of hand, something that drives a person to say, "I can't take it" or "It can't go on like this." And there is resurrection, the rebirth of hope, the conviction that God can make something good out of even the most wretched stuff of life. This is faith. We are joined to Christ in a death like his, even if it takes a much smaller and more routine form. As Paul says in Romans 6, we can also share a resurrection like his.

Often the people who are the most inspiring to talk to in congregations are those who have been in the valley of the shadow of death and have learned of the rebirth of hope. They have gotten enough of a taste of death to recognize a resurrection when they see one. Nobody can tell you about the miracle of rain, for example, like farm people who have been through a drought. People who have experienced long-term unemployment often are the ones who can tell you the most about the joy of work. Nobody knows more about the miracle of the ordinary than those who have lost it for a time to hospitalization and recovery.

The Divine Spread

After including in the explanation a whole long list of things that come with daily bread, Martin Luther is sure there is still a lot more. So he concludes with the words "and the like." Once gratitude takes over, gifts appear, most apparently in the very things that we usually take for granted, like a deep breath, cold water, or a comfortable chair.

To be sure, virtually everything that is named in the explanation—with the possible exception of the weather—involves work. Food doesn't just appear on the table, not any more than Elijah's little cake appeared without preparation. "Good government" involves a lot of dedication and selflessness, so much so that when it actually happens, we are a little surprised.

But hidden within the work involved in these ordinary things is a gift. A person who has baked, for example, can tell you about the miracle involved in good flour, a tablespoon of yeast, and a warm spot on top of the refrigerator or by a radiator. Someone who has endured

committee meetings, managed compromise, and gathered enough votes to approve a proposal can tell you about that extra something that makes the law work. Even television meteorologists, sometimes unfairly condemned for a missed prediction, can speak of the wonderful combinations that seemingly appear out of nowhere, turning the weather from bad to beautiful.

9. **Find a miracle in everyday occurrences.** What does work have to do with the miracle? Name the gift in it beyond work, that which comes spontaneously or by surprise.

The Vocations

When gratitude exposes the gifts hidden in the ordinary, it is possible to see the real purpose and value of our work. As the apostle Paul says in Romans 12, the Spirit of the risen Christ endows each of us with our own particular gifts. The gifts are tailor-made and cut to fit perfectly. So each of us has something to offer, no matter how small or large. Each of us has a particular point in our daily lives when Christ makes us indispensable.

These gifts are also “callings” or “vocations.” They are the points where God makes us useful in the continuing care for and restoration of creation. In your everyday relationships, God is at work to push back the powers of sin and to bring in the new creation.

Such day-to-day relationships include your relationship with your family and your work in your community and church.

10. **Everyday callings are those we share with everyone. Special callings are not as common, and come with the special gifts of the Holy Spirit. What are your everyday callings? What are your special callings? Give some examples of times or situations where God has made you particularly useful in your callings.**

Prayer Partners

We don't always see ourselves clearly. With your prayer partner or partners, give thanks for the gifts you have received and the gifts God has given through you. Be specific. The Holy Spirit doesn't use cookie cutters; in God's eyes, each of us is unique.

Looking Ahead

For having gifted us in such marvelous ways, having called us, Christ Jesus takes on our relationships to free us in the forgiveness of sins. That is what we pray for next.

James Arne Nestingen is professor of church history at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

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by Deb Pangerl

Lessons from Tanzania

IN NOVEMBER 2000, I TRAVELED WITH SOME OF THE MOST WONDERFUL WOMEN IN THE WORLD TO KENYA AND TANZANIA.

We learned so much. Our hearts were ripped open when we heard the stories of female genital mutilation, young children living on the street because they have a better chance of surviving there than at their home, the AIDS epidemic, and educational and environmental concerns. I am haunted by the memory of a four-year-old child on the street carrying his two-year-old sister, begging for food.

After the two-week journey, I continued on to Iringa, Tanzania, to join my mother, LaDez Pangerl (who was 73 years old and had never been out of the country), and some other women from First Lutheran in Rush City, Minnesota. After a joyfully tearful reunion, we continued on to our companion congregation in Kitowo. We were greeted by the most gracious people I have ever met. They have nothing, yet they gave from their hearts.

The last day of our stay in the village, my mother suddenly became seriously ill. We were two and a half hours from the nearest telephone and hospital. I tried not to panic. I knew that Mom and I were meant to go on this trip together and that God would send an angel to look after us; I never doubted it. We drove her to the dispensary in Pommern, where they tried to find a thermometer to take her temperature. I suddenly realized that I had more medical supplies

in my bathroom at home than they had in their dispensary for nearly 100,000 people. The doctor was from India and spoke little English. Since we didn't speak his language, there was quite a bit of confusion.

Someone mentioned malaria. My heart sank. The only thing to do was to have her rest in the old mission house and hope that her temperature would drop with the medication. We could only pray and wait, and then pray some more. That evening, the women from Kitowo came to visit Mom and pray for her, too.

As I sat alone, praying for my mother, I looked up at the lantern-lit wall. Someone had written, "We are each angels with only one wing—and we can only fly embracing each other." Mom's fever broke during the night. We still don't know what happened, but our prayers were answered.

Tonight, when you say your prayers, please remember our friends in Africa and what they face each day, and the children who go without the basics of life that we take for granted. Who knows—maybe your wings will open and you will embrace another angel who is waiting to fly.

Deb Pangerl is a member of the Companion Synod Task Force for the St. Paul Area Synod.



Seeking Unity among Christians

by Julie E. Ryan

In seminary, a group of about eight of us—Lutheran, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Christian Reformed—got together every night for dinner. We took turns cooking and leading grace before the meal. One night for grace, the leader asked us to hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer. All was harmonious until "trespasses," "sins," and "debts" collided. Awkward silence gave way to nervous giggles that finally turned into more relaxed laughter. Then we resolutely finished the prayer, forgiving our debtors as well as those who had sinned and trespassed against us. Then we ate.

That experience of Christian unity seems typical of many: We begin with the best of intentions until denominational differences trip us up in ways we hadn't expected. Then we get our bearings and decide whether and how to move forward.

It may help to think of Christians as an enormous extended family. We know what it is to yearn

for an end to alienation among a family's estranged members. At weddings, funerals, and reunions we encounter the particular twists and gnarls of the family tree's different branches. The directions and forms they take are their attempts to grow through particular seasons and events. Their singular bends and knots are signs of their history, showing how they have stretched out into the air as the whole tree has sent down its roots and reached upward toward life-giving light. Each branch has a story to tell; each is part of the whole.

What are the benefits of seeking and praying for Christian unity?

First, our life with God is enriched. The more we learn, the more we comprehend the variety of ways we can express our relationship with the One whose mystery is infinite. Our repertoire of approach is expanded too. Anglican priest Herbert O'Driscoll

tells a story about visiting an Orthodox church in the Middle East. The people there took delight in showing him how every inch of the walls and ceiling were colorfully and elaborately painted to remind them of the glories of heaven. From there, O'Driscoll flew directly to rural Canada, where Christians of Calvinist background proudly gave him a tour of their church. It was purposely stark—devoid of any adornment whatsoever—to remind worshipers not to let anything distract them from God.

Each of these ways of expressing relationship with God bears a valid, if partial, witness to the truth. The many witnesses need one another for mutual correction. There are many styles of approach, but the same God; many branches, but the same tree; many gifts, but the same Spirit who inspires them for the common good.

As we interact and pray with and for other Christians we get a sense of perspective, a sense of the whole beyond our local congregation—the forest as well as the trees as well as the branches. And we see how they all matter. With deepened awareness we can treasure our particular heritage as we see it through the eyes of others and sort out all over again where we feel most at home.

Some of us belong to denominations whose spirituality expresses itself quietly and privately. Others feel the movement of the Spirit in shouting and jubilant song. Some of us touch holiness in our experience of surrendering control and receiving ecstatic “anointing.” Others feel sheltered and empowered within the ancient structures of formal prayer. The varied styles and expressions are as unique as those who experience them.

Our temptation, when we are confronted with someone who is different from us, is to revert to an all-or-nothing approach. We uncritically decide that we are the standard, and they have nothing to teach

us. Or—more commonly for women—we put ourselves down. We decide that we know nothing and that they have all the answers.

But caving in isn't reconciling conflict. Rather, we need to find out from others what their doctrine or prayer style means to them, and then weigh it against our own. We gain spiritual maturity through practice, as we grow in our ability to both retain our sense of integrity and stay connected with others who are so different.

As we become open to a range of religious expression, we will choose what is authentic for ourselves in this place and time. We will find that we have an expanded capacity for wisdom and life-giving choice.

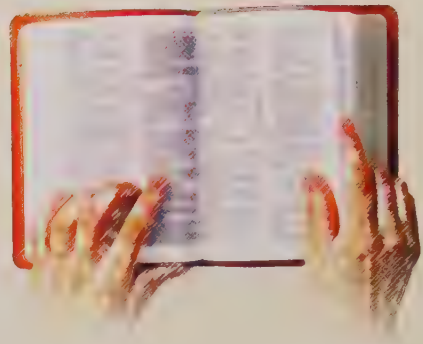
What can you do to help open your hearts as you pray for Christian unity? You can:

- **Attend** somebody else's church service.
- **Ask** someone from a different denomination what is meaningful to them about their tradition (for example, their worship services, their educational upbringing, their style of private prayer), and why.
- **Explore** your own family history. Is it all Lutheran, or are there other strands? Ask someone from a different generation or branch what they treasure in their life of faith. How have things changed over the years? What has stayed the same?
- **Check out** the reference book, *Honoring Our Neighbor's Faith*, edited by Robert Buckley Farlee (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999). It contains accessible two- to three-page descriptive summaries of different Christian denominations and other religions.
- **Ask** someone new to say grace!

Julie Ryan, an ELCA pastor, serves in interim ministry and writes worship resources for Augsburg Fortress, Publishers.

Session 6

Freedom in Forgiveness



by James Arne Nestingen

Study Text

Genesis 50:15–21

The Fifth Petition

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

What is this?

Answer: We ask in this prayer that our heavenly Father not regard our sins or deny these petitions on their account, for we are worthy of nothing for which we ask, nor have we earned it. Instead we ask that God give us all things by grace, for we sin daily and indeed earn only punishment. So, on the other hand, we, too, truly want to forgive heartily and do good gladly to those who sin against us. (from *Luther's Small Catechism*)

Memory Verse

"I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."
(Isaiah 43:25)

Overview

Having made sure there is food on the table, the Lord takes on the relationships among those seated around and beyond it. In forgiveness, Jesus strips the past of its accusations to open up the future in freedom.

Opening

"What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry Ev'rything to God in prayer! Oh, what peace we often forfeit; Oh, what needless pain we bear—All because we do not carry Ev'rything to God in prayer!" ("What a Friend We Have in Jesus," *Lutheran Book of Worship* 439)

Joseph and his Brothers

For all the gifts we receive in family, there is also plenty of conflict among family members. No one is as close to us as a sister or brother, yet no one can hit a tender spot quite like a sibling, either. Both blessings and troubles are commonly found in others around the house—in parents, spouses, and the children that may follow.

You can imagine how complicated life must have been around Jacob's house. To begin with, there was his wife Leah, then wife Rachel, and then all those children. And in the middle of it all there was Jacob, who disrupted the family peace by choosing favorites, essentially saying, "There's nobody like Rachel! And what about Joseph? Isn't he the best of the lot?"

You remember what followed, too. Jacob's wives fought. And while the other 11 sons were grinding their teeth, Joseph wore a coat of many colors, missing no opportunity to remind them of his favored position. So when the brothers got the opportunity, they sold Joseph into slavery and broke Jacob's heart. But the brothers forgot how much God loves to turn the tables. Forced by the effects of a long drought to go to Egypt for their daily bread, they learned, to their terror, that Joseph (gifted with some of his father's ability to spot an opportunity) had secured a special vocation with Pharaoh: distributing the welfare.

1. **The wonderful story of the brothers' trips to Egypt for food is told in Genesis 42–44. Skim through these chapters, then read Genesis 45:1–7. What did Joseph expect his brothers to feel toward him when they realized he was still alive? On what basis did he respond to them differently than they had feared?**

After identifying himself to them, Joseph loaded up his brothers with gifts. He gave a larger share to Benjamin, his full brother, another son of Rachel. Then Joseph sent all the brothers back to get Jacob, asking that the whole family move to Egypt so he could provide for them through the famine.

2. **Read Genesis 50. The brothers did what Joseph asked, reuniting the whole family. Jacob and Joseph fell into each other's arms. But the brothers were still apprehensive. What do you think worried them? Who or what could they count on for protection in this situation?**

Lies upon Lies

Martin Luther used to say that liars have to have good memories. The first lie requires a second to cover it, then a third and a fourth, making it easy to lose track along the way. The brothers had cold-heartedly deceived Jacob, watching him grieve after hearing that Joseph had been killed.

3. **What do you suppose the brothers told themselves to justify this original deceit? What would they have had to convince themselves of so that they would not tell the truth to Jacob?**
4. **In Genesis 50:16, the brothers again resorted to deceit. How did this lie relate to the first ones?**

One of the biblical names for the devil is Beelzebub, "the father of lies." Jesus picks this up in John 8:44, saying that when the devil lies "he speaks according to his own nature."

5. What lie did the serpent tell Eve in Genesis 3:4–5? How was this lie repeated in the hearts of Joseph’s brothers when they attempted to deceive Joseph?

The really troublesome sins, those that have painful consequences, generally begin this way. Family conflicts, neighborhood troubles, fights at work, and church uproars may sometimes be deliberate. But more commonly, people will look back and say, “I just didn’t feel like I had any alternative” or “I was only trying to do what was best” or “I didn’t realize where this would lead.”

The Forgiving Word

Joseph didn’t get to the top of Pharaoh’s bureaucracy by being gullible. Undoubtedly, with all the people under his command and all that food in his power, Joseph had learned to recognize the embellishments and half-truths people use to get their way.

Having already been victimized by his brothers, Joseph had a good idea of how far he could trust them. But instead of being angry and denouncing his brothers, Joseph began to cry.

6. Why did Joseph weep? Could his weeping have had any connection with what he told them when he first identified himself to them in Genesis 45:5? If so, what would it be?

The brothers had their own experiences, enough to know that when powerful people catch up with someone who has harmed them, there are usually some real consequences. Although they had based their appeal to Joseph on deceit, they

asked for forgiveness (Genesis 50:17), even repeating the request. But when Joseph wept, they weren’t sure how to read his reaction.

When Joseph pulled himself together, he answered his brothers’ appeal differently than they expected, going back to words like those he spoke in Genesis 45:5.

7. Read Genesis 50:19–20. Instead of dealing with his brothers on the basis of their behavior toward him, Joseph set out another basis for his relationship with them. What was it? What does this do to the past he shared with his brothers and to their deceit? Although Joseph didn’t directly say “I forgive you,” in what way were the words of verses 19–20 an absolution—a declaration of forgiveness?

Having dealt with the troubles of the past, Joseph went on to speak of the future relationship he will share with his family.

8. Read Genesis 50:21. What promise did Joseph make to his brothers? What was the relationship between this promise and what he said in verses 19–20?

Forgetting the Past

Forgiveness always comes in three dimensions. First, God deals with our past, refusing to regard our sins. Second, God opens the future, giving all things by grace. Third, God works in and upon us until finally we can heartily forgive those who have sinned against us.

Usually, when sins are sins of the “second tablet” of the Ten Commandments—those that involve our relationships with other people—they are fairly easy to see. Sins of the “first

tablet,” which deal with our faith and relationship to God, are harder to see and are often more devastating.

Sins have Consequences

The consequences of sin play themselves out. So when Joseph’s brothers got rid of him—a sin of the “second tablet”—they had to live with the results, trying to protect themselves as far as they could by their deceptions. God did not step in and deliver them. Rather, God knows that in human life, one thing usually follows another. So, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1, God let us go so that we taste some of the fruit.

At the same time, in forgiveness God does something more. Putting it negatively (the positive will soon follow), God “does not regard our sin.” In other words, God does not make sins a basis for our relationship with him.

Genesis 50 gives us a wonderfully human picture of this. There are consequences in the story—even after Jacob forgave his brothers in Genesis 45, they were still afraid in Genesis 50:19. They couldn’t believe it! But under the power of God’s Spirit, Joseph disregarded their sin—he wouldn’t let the crime be a basis of the relationship, but instead dealt with them on the basis of what God had done with him.

9. In Isaiah 43:25, God promises not to remember our sins. Although we may try to “forgive and forget,” forgetting is the hard part. Only God, who truly knows everything, can really forget. How is “not regarding” like forgetting, or “not remembering”? What happens to the consequences? What effect does God’s “not regarding” have on our relationship with God?

Gracing the Future

The second dimension of forgiveness involves the future. When someone invests another’s sins at compound interest, collecting the dividend every time there is an advantage, the future is bleak. But when transgressions are blotted out, a new future can emerge. The sin has lost its standing; there are new possibilities, other chances of being together in different ways.

Again, the story of Joseph and his brothers provides a fine illustration of this. Disregarding what his brothers did to him, acting on the basis of what God has done for him, Joseph promised a new future. “I myself will provide for you and your little ones,” he said (Genesis 50:21). In fact, that is just how it worked out, at least until another pharaoh came along who had another kind of forgetfulness—he didn’t remember Joseph (Exodus 1:8).

As Martin Luther said, when we pray that God will not regard our sins, we at the same time ask God to “give us everything by grace.” That is, we ask that tomorrow, the next day, and all the days that follow will not be controlled by us, but that God will shape them out of goodness and grace.

10. What would control the future, according to Martin Luther’s explanation, if God shaped the future on any other basis but grace? Is this a fair description of your experience?

Spilling Over

As forgetful as we can be, there are some things we just can’t forget. Sometimes it is something we ourselves have done, sometimes something that has been done to us. We keep circling back, rehearsing, recording, remembering; re-rehearsing,

re-recording and so on, until there appears to be no way out.

That might be what made Joseph's brothers so fearful, even after Joseph told them the first time that they were forgiven.

It is in the very nature of forgiveness for it to flow everywhere—to fill up the emptiness left by a recurring self-accusation, to overflow into relationships with others, gracing them in the same way that we have been graced.

For this reason, Jesus finishes the Fifth Petition with these words, "as we forgive those who sin against us," and Luther echoes them in the explanation, adding the word "heartily" just to underscore the importance.

If we cannot disregard an old sin, if it keeps coming up again and again, the consequences just continue to roll and the future will be more of the same. Life will only change for the better when sin loses its standing.

But Jesus never just leaves us with commands. The forgiveness of those who sin against us is too important to him to leave it in our hands. So Jesus teaches us to ask him for the power to forgive others—parents, spouses, co-workers—with these very words. And then,

maybe soon, maybe farther in the future, he answers—forgiving us even our inability to forgive, and working in, through, and beyond us until finally we have no alternative.

Prayer Partners

With your prayer partner, use the service of "Individual Confession and Forgiveness" (beginning on page 196 of *Lutheran Book of Worship*) to hear one another's confession and absolve one another. Remember that although the words are for pastors, Christ welcomes you, as a baptized believer, to do this.

Looking Ahead

Living by grace, being soft-hearted enough to recognize God's gifts of daily bread and forgiveness, makes a person a target for the powers in the Third Petition. They always seem to reclaim lost territory, the people who have been set free. So we pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

James Arne Nestingen is professor of church history at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

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Convention Without Walls

EVERYONE KNOWS THAT WOMEN OF THE ELCA WILL BE HOSTING THE FIFTH TRIENNIAL GATHERING IN PHILADELPHIA, JULY 8-14, 2002. You already know that the days and nights of this exciting event will be filled with worship, learning, and celebration. You are excited at the thought of reconnecting with friends and meeting new ones. What you may not yet know is that there will be special opportunities for you at TG '02—Convention Without Walls (CWW).

CWW will offer you an opportunity to move beyond the Pennsylvania Convention Center into the surrounding community and experience programs and ministries that are models of God's call to grow in faith and to work for wholeness and justice in church*and society. *As a gathering participant, you may choose one of the 20 special enrichment opportunities* that will enable you to see and participate in Christian ministry in action. At this time, the options listed are subject to change. For more details, please see the registration brochure and form (available January 2002).

OPTION I

Hearing God's Call: Growing in Faith and Wisdom

In this category you can experience the rich religious heritage of Philadelphia and various opportunities for theological training and spiritual enrichment.

Peace, reconciliation, and nonviolence Visit the historic Arch Street Quaker Meeting House and learn about the Quaker tradition and how it continues to promote peace in the midst of the world's violence.*
Philadelphia's rich religious heritage Take a tour through history and explore Philadelphia's deep Lutheran and ecumenical roots.*

The labyrinth: sacred pattern, sacred path Just a short three-block walk from the Convention Center,

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church invites you to take a spiritual, meditative journey through a labyrinth.*

Theological education Journey to the Philadelphia Lutheran Theological Seminary and increase your understanding of the role of theological education in today's world.*

Prayer around the cross Walk with other women to a beautiful, historic church several blocks from the Convention Center and join in a calming, meditative, reflective service of prayer, word, song, and silence.*

Spiritual discernment retreat Members of the Lutheran Deaconess Community guide you in assessing, understanding, and appreciating your spiritual gifts.**

OPTION II

Experiencing God's Call: Learning How to Build Healthy Families and Communities

Programs in this category will help participants understand in depth the variety of ways in which people and organizations in the Philadelphia area respond to God's call through direct service, empowerment, and working for systemic change.

Community stabilization Experience how Philadelphia Interfaith Action, a broad-based organization of congregations (many of them Lutheran) and community groups, works to strengthen local communities.*

Stopping domestic violence Learn about the multifaceted ministry of the Lutheran Settlement House and participate in a special program about what you can do to respond to domestic violence.*

Support for at-risk children Visit the Silver Spring-Martin Luther School and see how it provides a home, education, and support for children who have experienced abuse and neglect.*

Addressing homelessness and poverty Tour the various ministries sponsored by Project H.O.M.E. such as rehabbed abandoned homes, transitional housing units for formerly homeless persons, and community gardens, and speak with some of the people whose lives have been changed.*

Food for the hungry Learn how Aid for Friends involves more than 250 congregations and 400 schools and youth groups in preparing and delivering meals for those who are homebound.*

Women around the world Lutheran World Relief will introduce you to women who are working hard to provide a better life for their families and their communities.**

Welcoming the stranger Let Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service take you around the world as you walk in the footsteps of refugees and migrants.**

OPTION III

Living God's Call: Using Gifts and Skills in Service to Neighbor

Here the focus is on providing participants with "hands-on" opportunities for ministry.

Camden Lutheran Parish Cross the river into New Jersey and explore how Lutheran churches in this area reach out to the community, and participate with them in some hands-on ministry opportunities.*

AIDS ministries University Lutheran Church will describe how it collaborates with other partners in ministry to people with AIDS and will provide a chance for you to become involved.*

Housing rehabilitation Travel to a work site and be part of a Habitat for Humanity building crew.*

Empowerment of low-income families Be prepared to join with the Lutheran Centro Nueva Creacion in such projects as weeding and cleaning parks and community gardens, painting murals, and teaching children in the summer camp at the church.

Thrift store renovation Help put the finishing touches on a thrift store sponsored by Christ Lutheran Church in Upper Darby, the local community, and Liberty Lutheran Services.*

Education and advocacy The Pennsylvania Lutheran Advocacy Network will help you and your congregation be informed and confident advocates for those who can't speak for themselves.**

Being a welcoming space for strangers Involve yourself in a hands-on opportunity to build and strengthen relationships with people who otherwise may be forgotten or ignored in your church community.**

* *In or around Philadelphia*

** *At the Marriott Hotel or in the Convention Center.*

To hear more information on the Triennial Gathering, call our Information Line at 800-638-3522 ext. 2020.

BETWEEN YOU AND ME

Lessons

by Linda Chinnia

AS A TEACHER, I KNOW THAT ONE OF THE KEY STRATEGIES IN LESSON PLANNING IS TO CLEAR UNFAMILIAR VOCABULARY BEFORE TEACHING NEW CONCEPTS. I THOUGHT OF THIS AS I REFLECTED ON THE THEMES FOR THIS ISSUE OF LWT.

The themes represent concepts that are particularly challenging in these times, after the tragedies of September 11, 2001. How do we help our children understand forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewal in a world that seems preoccupied with hatred, vengeance, and destruction?

Children have watched the horrible events on television. They have been caught up in the wave of patriotism—displaying flags, singing patriotic songs, attending civic celebrations and memorials, and helping with relief efforts. Their school chatter has changed from video games and sports to debates about America's retaliation and military actions. None of these actions fosters understanding of forgiveness, reconciliation, or renewal.

In the midst of my reflections, I recalled a life-changing experience I had during the 2001 Women's Leadership Roundtable and Churchwide Assembly. A Christian educator from Palestine, Viola Raheb*, spoke of the struggles of her people in a land filled with the products of hatred, vengeance, and destruction. She gave a different (and often unfamiliar) perspective on events in her homeland.

She told of a frightening night when bombs fell close to her home. As her adult guests spoke of retaliation, her young niece reminded them that more bloodshed and violence would not solve their problems. She insisted that people should stop killing each other and remember God's love. What powerful theology from such a little girl!

Christ often spoke of the need for us to come to God as children—to be born again and to have a childlike, all-embracing faith. Perhaps we should ponder the words of a familiar children's song if we truly want to learn to forgive others, reconcile our differences, and renew relationships: "Jesus loves the little children; All the children of the world. Red, brown, yellow, black, and white; They are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world."

As we focus on the goal of creating and maintaining community, we must clear the vocabulary for the true understanding of what it means to be God's community—to love the Lord with all our hearts, strength, and minds, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Once we grasp this concept, we will be prepared to act boldly on our faith in Jesus Christ.

**Read LWT's interview with Viola on pages 24-29 of this issue.*

Linda Chinnia is area executive officer for the Baltimore public school system and churchwide president of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

Bring It On! Let Your Kingdom Come

by Catherine Malotky

FAITH-GIVING GOD, WHEN THE CURRENT OF LIFE FLOWS AGAINST ME, FAITH IS HARD. YOU ARE THE GOD OF LOVE AND LIFE, BUT SOMETIMES IT ALMOST SEEMS THAT I AM NAVIGATING A DIFFERENT RIVER ALTOGETHER.

You have given us visions of your kingdom—a world that works for everyone, where needs are met and gifts are called forth. Paul reminds us that even the creation groans in labor awaiting the coming of your will and way (Romans 8:22). So, God, why do you make us work so hard? Why must we wait? Why can't you do what I imagine the creator of the whole universe would do—just bring it on, let your kingdom come.

We need you. Our earth is at its most fragile since you fashioned it. You would have figured out how to have progress without pollution. You would have figured out how to create an economic system that allows everyone to thrive, not just those favored by the marketplace. All people would live abundantly. And the earth would sing for joy—ours and yours.

I know your way is not about wealth. Abundance and wealth are two different things. But the momentum of accumulating comfort to make up for my sense of mortal precariousness is a strong current.

I know that the things I long for will not make up for the fact that I will die someday. I know that twists of fortune can, in an instant, rearrange my carefully laid-out life plans. It has happened before, in both quiet and momentous ways. I can count on very little for sure, and that makes me—deep down—nervous.

So I wonder, God, why you don't just swoop in here and tidy things up? I yearn for it so. And I feel so helpless to make a difference. I can drive a car with better gas mileage, pool my errands to reduce trips, and find other ways to get around. But if others do not also do these things, what difference will my small gestures make? I cannot save the world!

Ah, perhaps this is faith—that I still do these things. I can do these things because I am called and inspired by your vision, because they are right for me to do, for the sake of the generations that will follow me. I can do these things because I believe that your kingdom will come one day, and I want to know that I helped, even if just a little.

Catherine Malotky serves in communications at the ELCA Board of Pensions. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.

READER CALL

TOPICS AND DEADLINES

Mail or email to *LWT* Editorial Office

May 2002

Do you see yourself as a leader? Why or why not?

Due January 10, 2002

June 2002

Share a momentous transition of your own or of someone you care about. How was your response to that shaped by your faith?

Due February 10, 2002

July/August 2002

How do you discern God's call?

Due March 10, 2002

IDEANET

TOPICS AND DEADLINES

Use the enclosed card or email IdeaNet@elca.org

May 2002

Vacation Bible School

When do you have it, who is it for, and what materials do you use? Share some ideas that might benefit others.

Due January 10, 2002

June 2002

Listen, God Is Calling

The theme for the Triennial Gathering is "Listen, God Is Calling." How do you listen to God? How do you discern what you believe God is saying to you?

Due February 10, 2002

July/August 2002

Where and how do you go on vacation to get away for rest and renewal?

Due March 10, 2002

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I am trusting you, Lord Jesus,
Trusting only you;
Trusting you for full salvation,
Free and true.

I am trusting you for pardon;
At your feet I bow,
For your grace and tender mercy
Trusting now.

I am trusting you for cleansing
In the crimson flood;
Trusting you to make me holy
By your blood.

("I Am Trusting You, Lord Jesus," *Lutheran Book of Worship*, 460)

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